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## VII. THE NAVAL QUESTION IN ANGLO-GERMAN RELATIONS, 1912–1914

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WHEN Sir Llewellyn Woodward wrote his distinguished book *Great Britain and the German Navy*<sup>1</sup> in 1935, the last volumes of Gooch and Temperley<sup>2</sup> were not yet published, and the original papers were still subject to the fifty-year rule. In 1971, all of the Gooch and Temperley collection of documents has long since been available; and the archives have been open since 1965. It is therefore possible to add to what Sir Llewellyn wrote, and this article seeks to show, not differently from him, but more fully, how the naval holiday proposals unfolded and how the general tenor of Anglo-German relations remained unaltered in this most vital area. Nothing that the Haldane Mission had done, nor even the general co-operation between London and Berlin during the Balkan Wars, could change the fundamental position—despite Baron Marschall's hopes.<sup>3</sup>

Churchill, introducing his first naval estimates into the House of Commons in March 1912, made the initial 'naval holiday' proposal. He was to repeat it twice. The argument following Lord Haldane's mission to Berlin in February was still proceeding with some vigour,<sup>4</sup> alternatively advancing and retreating as kaleidoscopic changes of policy appeared at Berlin. The possibility of a *détente* still appeared to exist; but, equally, the Admiralty expected the Germans to proceed with naval expansion—a programme known in detail in London<sup>5</sup>—

<sup>1</sup> E. L. Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy* (Oxford, 1935 and Frank Cass, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> G. P. Gooch and H. W. V. Temperley (eds.), *British Documents on the Origins of the War*. Eleven volumes were published between 1924 and 1937. In this case the relevant volume is x, ii, published in 1937.

<sup>3</sup> Grey to Goschen, 8 Aug. 1913, F.O.371/1377/32560/12, B.D. x, ii, 451. The German Ambassador remarked that 'the thing was to create a thoroughly good and healthy atmosphere between the two countries and then they would see that it was perfectly absurd to continue this competitive race in defensive arms'.

<sup>4</sup> The argument had ceased to be real by the date of Churchill's speech—18 March—though the British Government did not yet know this. On that day Bethmann telegraphed to Metternich rejecting as 'worthless to our purpose' the formula which the Cabinet had just agreed. It was the closest that the British Government would go to neutrality and represented a very real concession: but it was rejected out of hand. Bethmann to Metternich, 18 Mar. 1912, G.P. xxx, 188. For more details of this, see my article in the forthcoming *Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey*.

<sup>5</sup> The German Government had given Lord Haldane a copy of their projected new naval law, which he sent to the Admiralty on his return to London. It was much more expansionist than had been expected and caused genuine shock in the Admiralty. Grey to Goschen, 24 Feb. 1912, Admiralty

and a further increase had therefore to be anticipated. The First Lord catered for both eventualities: 'These estimates', he began, 'have been framed on the assumption that the existing programmes of other naval Powers will not be increased. In the event of such increases, it will be necessary to present supplementary estimates for both men and money.' Churchill explained that a naval superiority of 60 per cent was now to be maintained and that it applied to ships of the 'Dreadnought' class only. For lesser vessels a greater superiority was necessary and would be upheld. He was clear, by contrast, that this need not mean inevitable expansion:

... any retardation or reduction in German construction will, within certain limits, be promptly followed here... by large and fully proportioned reductions. For instance, if Germany elected to drop out any one, or even any two, of these annual quotas... we will at once, in the absence of any dangerous development elsewhere not now foreseen, blot out our corresponding quota, and the slowing down by Germany will be accompanied naturally on our larger scale by us. Take as an instance... the year 1913. In that year... Germany will build three capital ships, and it will be necessary for us to build five in consequence. Supposing we were both to take a holiday for that year... The three ships that she did not build would therefore automatically wipe out no fewer than five British potential super-Dreadnoughts, and that is more than I expect them to hope to do in a brilliant naval action.<sup>6</sup>

These proposals met with a sour reception in Germany. Churchill had already caused great offence by saying in a speech at Glasgow on 9 February that the German fleet was 'something in the nature of a luxury'. The point was one often spoken of in England, particularly by those who wondered what the Germans would say if England began to assemble a large continental army<sup>7</sup>; but the word *Luxus* in German has disagreeable connotations which directed attention to the language rather than the substance. Far greater pressures than petty annoyance moved the German Government to introduce increased estimates in the form of the *Novelle* later in April.<sup>8</sup> It was passed through the Reichstag without much difficulty, and the German press cold-shouldered Churchill's proposal. The Kaiser 'sent me a courteous message through Sir Ernest Cassel expressing his great regret, but adding that such an arrangement would only be possible between allies'.<sup>9</sup> He had earlier been somewhat less urbane.<sup>10</sup>

The introduction of the *Novelle* finally brought the chance of an agreement,

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memorandum enclosed, F.O.C.P. 10575, 72. Cabinet Memorandum by Churchill, 14 Feb. 1912, and Admiralty Memorandum by Churchill, 15 Feb. 1912; R. S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill, Companion Volume III* (Heinemann, 1969), pp. 1515-8.

<sup>6</sup> Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, Fifth Series, vol. xxxiv, cols. 1340-1, and vol. xxxv, col. 35.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Churchill. See *The World Crisis* (London, 1923).

<sup>8</sup> See J. Steinberg, *Yesterday's Deterrent* (London, 1964).

<sup>9</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1911-1918* (London, 1968), 1, 80.

<sup>10</sup> The German programme was based upon German needs and 'it does not matter what counter measures England takes...' G.P. xxxi, 194.

following Lord Haldane's visit, to an end,<sup>11</sup> and also introduced a series of justifications of the Germany navy, which were remarkable for their steady avoidance of any mention of England. The strategy of Tirpitz, publicly deployed in preambles to Navy Bills put before the Reichstag, violently embroidered at the frequent meetings of the Germany Navy League, was nowhere to be found in this excellent example from the Chancellor.

'A really great Power with a seaboard could not be a *Landratte*; she *must* have a fleet and a strong fleet. Her fleet was not in the least directed against us (England) but it was an absolute necessity for a great Power.' Why then was it concentrated in the North Sea? 'Germany required her fleet not merely for defending her commerce, but for the general purpose of her greatness.'<sup>12</sup> Balfour, contributing to a German symposium, echoed a general reaction in Britain:

Without a superior fleet Britain would no longer count as a Power. Without any fleet at all Germany would remain the greatest Power in Europe. . . . The danger lies . . . in the co-existence of that marvellous instrument of warfare, the German army and navy, with the most assiduous, I had almost said the organised, advocacy of a policy which it seems impossible to reconcile with the peace of the world or the rights of nations.<sup>13</sup>

The naval question did not again arise until the following March, when both powers had to bring out new estimates. The interim only served to strengthen the Foreign Office in its determination not to have the central issues discussed at all. Formulae were to be abandoned<sup>14</sup> and the naval race pursued without further negotiation: indeed, Sir Eyre Crowe thought that

one of the main reasons why Anglo-German relations are now more cordial—(I do not overlook the obvious other reasons)—is that we have entirely ceased to discuss the question of limitation of armaments. I feel equally certain that any resumption of that discussion will have the inevitable effect of making relations worse again.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Grey to Goschen, 10 Apr. 1912, F.O.371/1373/15371/12, B.D. VI, 573.

<sup>12</sup> Granville to Nicolson, 18 Oct. 1912, Carnock MSS, Vol. 11/12, B.D. IX, ii, 47.

<sup>13</sup> Article in *Nord und Süd*, June and July 1912. When Balfour was sent papers by Churchill on the naval question in March 1912, he replied: 'A war entered upon for no other object than to restore the Germanic Empire of Charlemagne in a modern form, appears to me at once so wicked and so stupid as to be almost incredible. And yet it is almost impossible to make sense of modern German policy without crediting it with this intention.' Balfour to Churchill, 22 Mar. 1912, R. S. Churchill, *op. cit.* pp. 1530-1.

<sup>14</sup> Such formulae were designed to exchange a political agreement of some sort, as a concession from England, reductions or retardation of the German naval programme. Although such discussions alarmed the Foreign Office, they were unreal, as the Germans only wanted unconditional neutrality, which even a Liberal Cabinet could not give. Nevertheless, through 1912, Nicolson exchanged worries with his predecessor, Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, Viceroy of India: 'Discussions with Germany as to the formula, have, I am glad to say, been removed from that ground, which I thought a dangerous and delicate one, as I much feared that we should entangle ourselves in . . . engagements . . . which might cause umbrage and possibly suspicion to Russia and especially to France.' Hardinge Papers, 92, ii, 232, 18 Feb. 1912. In June he was still fearing 'a strenuous time on the subject', Hardinge Papers, 92, ii, 245, 3 June 1912, and in July he wrote ' . . . there is no doubt that the naval agreement has now passed out of practical politics, and my whole efforts are now directed in preventing any understanding being arrived at . . .' Hardinge Papers, 92, i, 287, 18 July 1912.

<sup>15</sup> Minute by Crowe on Grey to Goschen, 10 Feb. 1913, F.O.371/1649/7482/13.

Admiral Tirpitz's speech to the Budget Committee of the Reichstag was made on 6–7 February and both he and Jagow made conciliatory gestures.<sup>16</sup> Goschen reported at once, concentrating his attention on the performance of the Admiral, from whom such a mild tone came more oddly than from the perennially suave Jagow. As well as pleasing Jagow's foreign office, Admiral Tirpitz, thought Goschen,

also did a little business on his own account. H.E. knows perfectly well that public attention is for the moment concentrated on the army and that as regards the Navy he will have to mark time for a period. . . Under these circumstances it would be perfectly natural that he should hope that Great Britain might be induced to mark time also, and abstain from taking advantage of what might appear to be the psychological moment for forging ahead. It is therefore quite within the bounds of possibility that he threw out his references to the speech of the First Lord of the Admiralty and the ideas, but not the reservations, which it contained, in the hope that they might bear fruit in certain sections of public opinion in England, and produce an agitation in favour of naval economy. Indeed any hopes which his Excellency may have had in this respect would seem to have been already partially justified by the extremely unwise and premature discussions in certain English newspapers as to whether the capital ships offered by the Colonies should be included or not in the 16 to 10 proportion.<sup>17</sup>

To this Grey replied privately that both Tirpitz's and Jagow's statements to the Budget Committee had made a good impression in England, and would have an effect on Churchill's estimates speech. But, he had not taken the matter up because: 'I am under the impression that the German government would not like anything that looked as if we were going to make Tirpitz's statement the starting point for proposals about a naval agreement.'<sup>18</sup> Goschen obtained an impression from this that Grey had not fully taken in the possible traps which might follow from committing Churchill to a speech 'favourably affected by Tirpitz's remarks'. He wrote privately to Nicolson to this effect, dilating upon the probable ulterior motives Tirpitz may have had, and saying that he would rather not mention the matter to Jagow, even in passing, until he knew what the Government

<sup>16</sup> In the previous month, Goschen had reported a friendly article in the *Deutsche Revue*. The reaction to it in the Foreign Office was an accurate forecast of the reception that Tirpitz was to get. 'The article is only "friendly"', minuted Crowe, 'in the sense that its avowed object is to promote the rapprochement between England and Germany. But it also makes it plain that the one way to attain this object is to part England from France and Russia, and this is of course, the real German policy, and pursued so openly that the whole world is watching these persistent German efforts with either hope or anxiety.' Nicolson followed him: 'The aim of the article is clear—efforts are being renewed to detach us from our friends—the object is obvious—we should from every point of view be in a most parlous position and so would international peace, were such efforts to be successful.' Goschen to Grey, 2 Jan. 1913, F.O.371/1647/140/13.

<sup>17</sup> The capital ships offered by the Colonies referred to a proposal from Canada, for which see Woodward, *op. cit.*, and the speech of Mr Churchill's referred to was that of 18 Mar. 1912, in which he first raised the possibility of a 'naval holiday' and spoke of the ratio 16:10. Goschen to Grey, 10 Feb. 1913, F.O.371/1649/7482/6209/13. B.D. x, ii, 457.

<sup>18</sup> Grey to Goschen, 15 Feb. 1913, Grey Papers, F.O.800/23. B.D. x, ii, 459.

thought of his views.<sup>19</sup> Nicolson showed the letter to Grey, who, on 5 March, in a long and important letter, fully explained to Goschen what he felt about naval matters.

For seven years some of the pan-Germans in Germany have been working upon pro-Germans in this country. The pan-Germans are chauvinists; our pro-Germans are pacifists; but the latter are nevertheless very subject to the influence of the former.

It came to my knowledge that Professor Schiemann, one of the pan-Germans aforesaid, had written to one of the pro-Germans here after Tirpitz's speech, emphasizing the friendly nature of the statement, and saying that everything would depend upon whether we responded to it.

I had no intention of responding by proposing a naval agreement.

In the first place, I had been given to understand, indirectly, that when Lichnowsky came here he hoped that I would not raise the question of naval expenditure with him.

In the second place, if I were to do so, the naval press bureau in Germany would if it suited it, construe my action as an attempt to put pressure on Germany to reduce her naval expenditure; and Tirpitz at some future time say that his moderate statement had been abused for the purpose, and that therefore he could not say anything of which similar advantage might be taken.

In the third place, I do not wish to enter upon a discussion of a proportion of 16 to 10, because we never intended Colonial ships to be included in that, and we do not wish to enter into explanations."

But, Grey continued, there was no reason to give the pro-Germans in England any extra material for their cause by appearing 'to put our hand behind our back in a repellent fashion'. It was for this reason that he instructed Goschen to say that Tirpitz's statement might be expected to have a favourable effect on Churchill's estimates speech. The substance would remain unaltered, but the tone could be less stiff.

The pan-Germans have worked upon the pro-Germans here with varying intensity, but with unvarying want of success so far as influencing the policy of the British government is concerned. . . I do not, however, wish you to say anything about Tirpitz's statement, unless something is said to you, because I agree that what Tirpitz said does not amount to much, and the reason of his saying it is not the love of our beautiful eyes, but the extra 50 millions required for the German army.<sup>20</sup>

Churchill's statement, when on 20 March he came to make it in the House of Commons, was indeed less stiff in tone: it contained a renewed proposal for a 'naval holiday'.

If, for the space of a year . . . no new ships were built by any nation, in what conceivable manner would the interests of any nation be affected or prejudiced? The proposal . . . involves no alteration in the relative strength of the navies. It implies no abandonment of any scheme of naval reorganisation or of naval increase. It is contrary to the system of no Navy Law . . . The finances of every country would obtain relief.

It also, however, contained a straightforward denial of the risk theory: 'I must

<sup>19</sup> Goschen to Nicolson, 22 Feb. 1913, Carnock MSS, vol. 11, 1913. B.D. x, ii, 463.

<sup>20</sup> Grey to Goschen, 5 Mar. 1913, Grey Papers, F.O.800/23. B.D. x, ii, 465.

explicitly repudiate the suggestion that Great Britain can ever allow another naval power to approach her so nearly as to deflect or restrict her political action by purely naval pressure'. He pointed out that if Tirpitz accepted the ratio of 60 per cent superiority, then Germany should build nothing until England did, since 60 per cent was what obtained now. '... That might be a logical argument, but it would I am sure do a great deal of harm.'<sup>21</sup>

The reaction to this in Germany served only to emphasize the correctness of Grey's view that the Germans would not welcome fresh proposals.<sup>22</sup> The question now assumed a confusing three-sided aspect. The Chancellor had said in the Reichstag that Germany would await proposals<sup>23</sup>; Grey did not wish to make them, since he had rightly comprehended that they would not be welcome; the Kaiser and the Navy cabinet hoped they would not be made because they did not wish to incur the odium of refusal: and Churchill was determined that this bluff be called. This became very clear when in June Churchill let it be known that he would repeat his offer in the autumn. 'We are on our guard', wrote the Kaiser.<sup>24</sup> Tirpitz, replying to this information to his naval attaché in London, was more subtle:

... The fact that Churchill is going to bring forward his holiday proposals again . . . is not altogether convenient. It is to be feared that the military proposals with their heavy demands on the German taxpayer, the agreement with England about Central Africa, and the general wish for a lasting agreement with England, will ease the way for Churchill's plans. . . In general you are recommended to treat the matter in as dilatory a manner as possible, and less as a naval than purely political question. Therefore it is advisable that you should use the Ambassador . . . to talk to Grey about the danger of a naval discussion, and to say that Churchill can only harm the tender plant of a German-English détente by his plan of a naval holiday.<sup>25</sup>

By 26 June, Lichnowsky had written privately to Jagow to say that he would try to prevent any proposals from reaching Berlin, and at the same time he was told officially to inform Grey privately that the German Government would prefer that the proposal be not again mentioned.<sup>26</sup>

Later in the year, when in June the Canadian Parliament refused consent to an offer of three battleships for England, Churchill at once told the House of Commons that England's current building programme would have to be increased to

<sup>21</sup> Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, Fifth Series, vol. 1, cols. 1749-91.

<sup>22</sup> Confirmed almost at once: 'Herr v. Jagow admitted that Mr. Churchill's words as regards Germany had certainly been of the friendliest description; what he regretted . . . was that, owing to the quiet and restrained manner in which the German naval estimates had been treated by Admiral v. Tirpitz, the question of naval construction, so long as a source of controversy between the two countries, had ceased . . . to occupy a large place in public attention. Now he was afraid that public interest would again be revived and that newspapers on both sides would begin to show the heat that had always characterised their discussions of this thorny subject . . .' Goschen to Grey, 29 Mar. 1913. F.O.371/1647/14456/13. B.D. x, ii, 469.

<sup>23</sup> G.P. xxxix, 35-6.

<sup>24</sup> G.P. xxxix, 39-46.

<sup>25</sup> Tirpitz, *My Memoirs* (London, 1919), Hopman to Müller, 11 June 1913, i, 395-7.

<sup>26</sup> G.P. xxxix, 48n.

make up for this.<sup>27</sup> The Germans were as annoyed by this as they were perturbed by advance information that Churchill intended to refer again to his 'naval holiday' proposal. The Kaiser told the British naval attaché of his

strong hope that such reference would not be made, otherwise he could not answer for the state of opinion in Germany. . . The Emperor said that he did not wish to make a fuss but that he wished his words to be repeated quietly and privately in the proper quarter. . .

The attaché added that he would deprecate further mention of the proposal and the King minuted that 'I entirely agree with the hope expressed by the Emperor'. All this produced a memorandum from Churchill pointing out with some justice that it was inequitable for the German Government

to enjoy the advantages of saying in public that they 'await proposals' and of saying confidentially that they will resent it if they are made. If therefore it is decided that no further reference to a 'naval holiday' should be made at the present time, I ought to be at liberty to state that we have received representations from the German government to the effect that they do not desire any such proposals.

Grey commented that he agreed that if no proposal was made, Germany must take public responsibility.<sup>28</sup> Lord Morley found agreement from the Prime Minister in suggesting that 'we should fall in with the Emperor's hopes'.<sup>29</sup>

What might happen if this did not occur was well illustrated by the unusually violent reaction to a speech that Churchill delivered to the Dundee Women's Liberal Association on 9 March. He evidently went out of his way to point out that Britain's naval expansion was a threat to nobody and intended only to buttress her own security. This perfectly ordinary discussion of the naval question elicited from the Kaiser some ridiculous minutes and worse, a short memorandum in which he hailed the success of the risk theory, and dismissed all past and future naval negotiations with England.

This is an implicit recognition—whole and complete—of the German naval law and

<sup>27</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Fifth Series (House of Commons), vol. LIII, cols. 1043–4. *The Daily News* on the following day, 6 June, carried an article stating that it was not clear whether Mr Churchill intended to build three ships in lieu of the Canadian ships. Both the statement and the newspaper article elicited protest from the German Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor. Goschen to Nicolson, 7 June 1913; Carnock MSS, vol. vi (1913), B.D. x, ii, 479.

<sup>28</sup> Minute by Mr Churchill, 8 July 1913. Grey Papers, F.O.800/48. B.D. x, ii, 481.

<sup>29</sup> Minute by Lord Morley on above paper. Later in the year, a new naval attaché, Henderson, at the British Embassy, reported more detailed reasons for avoiding a repetition of the proposal. Goschen to Grey, F.O.371/5208/1653/13.D.414, 4 Nov. 1913. He concluded that while the Government might like to take advantage of the proposal, to help pay for a new insurance scheme, influential agitation in favour of the navy was too strong for them, and that the German people had been convinced of the need for a German navy of a specific size by a statutory date. 'To go back on any of these points is practically a constitutional impossibility in Germany . . . and the worst of it is that this inability of the German government to meet the proposal half way is all in favour of the "forwards" (policy). Any future renewal of the "holiday" proposal would therefore only be playing into the hands of the "forwards" and would enable them to succeed in the very object for which the holiday was designed as an antidote.'



particularly of the 'risk' paragraphs by the British First Lord of the Admiralty. A more brilliant justification could not have been dreamed of or expected by me or by those who made the naval law with me, enlarged it, and defended it from all internal and external attacks. . . A grandiose triumph for Admiral Tirpitz before the whole world. He has deserved it, and it will give him a superlative position in the world. A new proof of my old theory that only firm, manly, and unshakeable defence of one's interests impresses the English, and at last brings them near to us. . . England comes to us, not in spite of, but because of, the Imperial Navy!! Avis au lecteur!!<sup>30</sup>

On 18 October, in a speech at Manchester, Churchill repeated his proposal for a holiday year in ship building, and received, according to Goschen's report 'almost universal disapproval' in the German press.<sup>31</sup> He had carefully said that the British Government would do nothing if Germany did not want to pursue the idea—which they had never admitted to publicly; and he pointed to the complications that were about to arise from the new naval programmes of Austria and Italy; he disclaimed any intention of putting Germany in the wrong or wishing to put on laurels himself. 'The proposal which I put forward', he continued,

in the name of His Majesty's Government is quite simple. . . Next year, apart from the Canadian ships or their equivalent, apart from anything that may be required by new developments in the Mediterranean, we are to lay down four great ships to Germany's two. Now we say, while there is plenty of time, in all friendship and sincerity to our great neighbour Germany:—If you will put off building your two ships for twelve months from the ordinary date when you would have begun them, we will put off building our four ships, in absolute good faith, for exactly the same period. That would mean that there would be a complete holiday for one year as far as big ships are concerned between Great Britain and Germany. There would be a saving, spread over three years, of nearly six millions to Germany and of nearly 12 millions to this country, and the relative strength of the two countries would be absolutely unchanged.<sup>32</sup>

The Ambassador at Berlin was more specific about his objections in a private letter to Nicolson a few days later:

Yes! the German Press is very down on Churchill's speech. It was quite certain that there would be uproar here if the Naval Holiday was again mentioned. . . I am not looking forward to my meeting with the Emperor . . . as he made such a very special point of the Naval Holiday not being brought up again.

Goschen went on to speculate as Churchill's reasons for renewing his idea and ended by giving his own views.

I . . . cling to the belief that the best way of taking the wind out of the sails of the Big Navy Party in Germany is to state frankly that if threatened with the further efforts to reduce our naval supremacy we shall make a big effort, by loan if necessary, to render that supremacy unassailable.

<sup>30</sup> G.P. xxxix, 51–2.

<sup>31</sup> Goschen to Grey, 22 Oct. 1913, F.O.371/1653/48702/13. B.D. x, ii, 485.

<sup>32</sup> *The Times*, 8 Oct. 1913, p. 10.

Grey minuted this letter, saying that he would write to Goschen and explain that,

It was essential after the public statement of Bethmann-Hollweg that he awaited proposals about a naval holiday to say something to our own people. The alternative to what Churchill did say would have been publicly to say that we understood the German government would dislike any proposals and therefore that we should make none. The Germans would have resented this still more.

This was done on 28 October, in an expanded form.<sup>33</sup>

The same problem arose at the same moment in 1914 when, speaking before a Reichstag commission, Tirpitz again said that positive naval proposals had not yet reached Germany, but that if they did, 'they would certainly be examined with goodwill'.<sup>34</sup> Grey reacted at once and telegraphed to Goschen to know exactly what Tirpitz had meant, as the matter was sure to be brought up in Parliament.

The sole reason why positive proposals from us have not reached Germany is that private intimations reaching us from high German sources gave us to understand that such proposals would be unwelcome and impair good relations between Germany and ourselves. . . We desire not to make any proposal that would be unwelcome, but being quite ready ourselves to make proposals, if they would be welcome, we must either make them or give some explanation in Parliament why after Admiral Tirpitz's statement as reported we do not do so.<sup>35</sup>

In view of the rising tide of feeling against the very high level of expenditure on armaments, Grey's alarm was understandable. His own party had spawned a revival of the Committee for the Reduction of Armaments, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer had allowed his optimism as to the progress of international politics and a consequent reduction in expenditure to become the property of the *News Chronicle*. A really serious conflict divided the Cabinet particularly about naval increases,<sup>36</sup> and Grey had chosen to answer critics of the Government in a great speech at Manchester on 3 February 1914. He had then gently discouraged the idea that it was England who must point the way to disarmament—knowing as he did that the Germans had asked him not to do so:

. . . we must not get into the habit of thinking that, if the world does not do what it seems obvious to us it ought to do, it is our fault; that they are dying to do it, only they are so bashful as to be waiting for a proposal from us to do what seems to us so obvious. . . It is no good making proposals (to Foreign Powers) which they will not welcome and are not prepared to receive. . . many great countries . . . still regard their expenditure on armaments as an internal affair and resent as intrusion demands from any foreign country that their expenditure on armaments should be open to discussion or arrangement. . .<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Goschen to Nicolson, 24 Oct. 1913, Carnock MSS, vol. x. 1913. B.D. x. ii, 486.

<sup>34</sup> *The Times*, 5 Feb. 1914, p. 8. See also G.P. xxxix, 75n.

<sup>35</sup> Grey to Goschen, 5 Feb. 1914. F.O.37/1987/5472/14. B.D. x, ii, 498.

<sup>36</sup> More on this has emerged through the publication of R. S. Churchill, *op. cit.* and vol. II

<sup>37</sup> Grey, *Speeches on Foreign Affairs, 1904-1914* (London, 1931), p. 225.

Goschen brought the matter up with Jagow, in response to Grey's urgent appeal, and obtained a temporizing reply, which, according to Crowe, 'could not have been more shifty'.<sup>38</sup> In a private letter to Nicolson, Goschen opined that Admiral Tirpitz must be regretting his statement, as 'the idea of a "Naval Holiday" is anathema to him and as far as one can judge most people in Germany except the Socialists'. If proposals now were made the German Government would incur the odium of having to refuse them, whereas up to the present they had been able to shelter behind the excuse that no proposals had been made.<sup>39</sup> With an official memorandum from Jagow of what Tirpitz said came the suggestion that 'If H.M.G. wish to make proposals to German Govt. on basis of 5 squadrons to 8, each consisting of 8 battleships, Imperial Govt. would examine them. These proposals must make some provision that other Great Powers do not add too heavily to their armaments'. Crowe saw falsehood in this, adding 'I feel confident that if we make a "definite proposal" we shall not be treated straightforwardly in the negotiation, and I regard any negotiation with so unscrupulous an adversary as highly dangerous.'<sup>40</sup>

No new proposals were offered, though they might have been, had not Grey been firmly obstructive. On 18 May, Goschen telegraphed privately to Grey with the news that the Emperor 'wishes it to be understood that he has invited the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Sea Lord to Kiel officially'.<sup>41</sup> Two days later, Churchill followed this with a long and enthusiastic memorandum supporting the idea that he should go to the Kiel week.<sup>42</sup> Grey's counter-memorandum was a cold douche.

<sup>38</sup> Goschen to Grey, 6 Feb. 1914, F.O.371/1987/5534/14, B.D. x, ii, 499. Crowe offered another opinion on Tirpitz three days later: 'Adm. v. Tirpitz described the improved Anglo-German relations as due to the fact that the German Navy Law has definitely provided for the creation of the German Fleet; in other words, that English friendliness is due to fear,' 10 Feb. 1914. Minute on Goschen to Grey, 7 Feb. 1914, F.O.371/1987/5818/14. Some weeks later came one of the first examples of a formidable junction of view: 'Germans are being assured that better relations with England are due to the growth of the German Fleet,' R. G. V. 3 Mar. 'But that is the belief of every German from the Emperor downward to the stable boy,' E.A.C., 4 Mar. Minutes by Vansittart and Crowe on Goschen to Grey, 27 Feb. 1914, F.O.371/1987/9014/14.

<sup>39</sup> Goschen to Nicolson, 6 Feb. 1914, Carnock MSS, vol. 1, 1914. B.D. x, ii, 500. It is of interest that at this time Professor Schiemann wrote an article advocating an Anglo-German alliance, reported by Goschen on 15 Feb., F.O.371/1487/7300/14.D.66. Crowe had an explanation for this 'effusion': 'Professor Schiemann is the intimate and mouthpiece of the German Emperor. He has been the instigator of the worst attacks and press campaigns against England, when these suited the (naval) policy of the German government. The present tack of the German govt. is to try by every means in their power to drive a wedge between England on one side and France and Russia on the other, and meanwhile to hurry on every possible strengthening of Germany's power of attack. It is in this connection that Prof. Schiemann's effusion shld. be read and considered. It is a rather clumsy "feeler".'

<sup>40</sup> Goschen to Grey, 10 Feb. 1914, recd. 11, F.O.371/1987/6310/14, B.D. x, ii, 501.

<sup>41</sup> Goschen to Grey, 18 May 1914, Grey Papers, F.O.800/23. B.D. x, ii, 501.

<sup>42</sup> Memorandum by Mr Churchill, 20 May 1914, Grey Papers, F.O.800/49. Addressed to Grey and Asquith. B.D. x, ii, 511.

... hitherto all efforts on our part to get naval expenditure discussed have been resented by Tirpitz even when welcomed by Bethmann-Hollweg. When Lichnowsky arrived an intimation was conveyed to me on his behalf that it was in the interest of both countries that I should not mention naval expenditure to him. I think, therefore, that a visit to Germany with the intention of raising with Tirpitz the points in the memorandum may not only be futile but may cause resentment.

With this was supplied a telegram, if the invitation was felt to need an answer, for Goschen to act on. It was quite uncompromising, concerned only that refusal should not be misinterpreted by the Kaiser.<sup>43</sup> Rather huffily, Churchill accepted Grey's opinion, and no more was heard of naval proposals.<sup>44</sup>

These exchanges show clearly that deadlock had been reached. Even if it is argued that the naval question was not a central issue, it is impossible not to appreciate its symptomatic significance. In the widest possible sphere, it was the symbol for some Germans of one aspect of their struggle for world power status. It was at the very core of their belief that England stood in their way. For others, it was a more subtle means of pressure whereby England might be induced to abandon her opposition to German continental ambitions. It was this aspect that was prominent between 1912 and 1914. The navy was to be used to extract a pledge of neutrality from England, since circumstances precluded the building-up of the Fleet into a genuine threat. But England could not permit an attempt to divide her from her friends, so that she might be tackled separately later, nor allow her food supplies to be menaced. No bargain was possible on the basis of a naval *détente*—even for one year's holiday—and a political agreement: there was no common ground between the two ideas.

Nor was it purely as an issue in international politics that the naval question was important. There was an emotional need behind the expansion of the German navy which did not derive solely from the desire to possess the proper accoutrements of a Great Power. The navy was the vehicle for the technological advances of the late nineteenth century and technological prowess was one of Germany's chief means of power. She would, like her ruler, have concealed a withered arm if she had not deployed that prowess on the water. Moreover, in a dangerously disunited country, which was the victim of a serious social malaise, the navy was national rather than separatist and, if not classless, at least middle-class. It was, in addition, the chief hobby of Kaiser William II.

To discover that this institution had become so painful a point that England saw little future in raising the issue, and Germany declined to discuss it after March 1912, brings a forcible realization of the deadlock that had come into existence. No negotiations over the future of the Portuguese colonies—although these, too, had broken down in June 1914—could be a substitute for serious discussion of the major issue; nor even the passing co-operation between Berlin and London during the Balkan Wars—particularly not when it is learnt that the

<sup>43</sup> Memorandum by Sir Edward Grey, 25 May 1914, Grey Papers, F.O.800/55, B.D. x, ii, 512.

<sup>44</sup> Minute by Churchill, 26 May 1914, Grey Papers, F.O.800/49, B.D. x, ii, 513.

Germans had decided that these were not the issue, nor was 1912–13 the time, when they wished to go to war.<sup>45</sup> The Kaiser may have believed that the naval race was bringing England to him: in fact he was watching his other country substitute a rigid policy where she had once shown flexibility and a determination not to be drawn where she had once wished to negotiate.

<sup>45</sup> Woodward, *op. cit.* ch. xxii.